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Orleans 'Plot'

New Kennedy Investigation Is Examined

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NEW ORLEANS — On Lafayette Square, across the street from the magnolia trees, the azalea bushes, the statue of Benjamin Franklin, and the newspaper plant of the Times-Picayune and States-Item, are two vacant offices which now carry "For Rent" signs.

One office, on the Camp Street side, once housed Cuban exiles involved in anti-Castro activities after the Bay of Pigs invasion; the other, on the Lafayette Street side, was the headquarters for Guy Banister Associates Inc., a private detective agency.

In the days before and after the Bay of Pigs in April, 1961, the Cubans met often in Banis-

ter's office. And there, two people are reliably reported to have informed Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, Lee Harvey Oswald was seen with the Cubans and the group around Banister.

3 in Group Named

That group included three of the persons whose names have surfaced since Garrison's investigation of President John F. Kennedy's assassination became public a week ago Friday. They are: Jack S. Martin, David Lewis, and David William Ferrie.

Martin and Lewis were employed by Banister's firm, Martin as an investigator and Lewis as a messenger and office man. Ferrie, who died this week, had been working closely with Banister in anti-Castro activities and also had retained Banister's firm to help him in a morals case with which he had been charged.

One of the Cubans who used to go to Banister's office told this reporter, in the course of a seven-hour conversation ending early Saturday morning, that Garrison had questioned him a

number of times in the past month. Garrison told him, the Cuban said, that witnesses have stated they saw him there with Oswald and the others.

The Cuban flatly denies it, and says he has offered to take a lie detector test and truth serum if necessary to substantiate his position. He has not been asked to take such tests, he says.

Met Oswald in 1963

That same Cuban, who wants to remain anonymous, in fact did meet Oswald at Oswald's apartment on Magazine Street in August 1963. He had gone there in an attempt to learn about Oswald's pro-Castro dealings in New Orleans and about Oswald's supposed Fair Play for Cuba Committee organization in the area.

Oswald gave him some literature as they left, he said. Then the Cuban promptly reported his contact with Oswald to the New Orleans Police Department.

After President Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, the Cuban repeated his account of meeting with Oswald to the Secret Service. The Warren Commission was fully aware of his meeting. After investigating that one incident and a host of other rumors involving Cubans — both for and against Castro —

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the commission concluded that Oswald had acted alone in killing the President.

Although the FBI is maintaining a strict "hands-off" position in connection with Garrison's highly publicized investigation and will not discuss the case, it is clear that the government places little credence in what has been turned up so far.

Motives Questioned

In the view of some who have been closely acquainted with the case, Garrison's material is a rehash of old information, with some new elements added. The district attorney's motives are being questioned; there is increasing talk that he wants to use his inquiry as a political springboard, that he intends to run for lieutenant governor this year, and higher office later.

"He has a long list of fraudulent issues," said one highly placed official here, referring to Garrison. "But he's as quick as a cat and he always lands on his feet."

That same official, he was not willing to be quoted by name, also said that Garrison might well be the shrewdest politician in Louisiana since the flamboyant Huey Long ruled the state.

Grows Ever Bolder

In the face of criticism and worldwide attention and speculation, Garrison has grown ever bolder in his public statements. Finally, on Friday, he said flatly he had "solved the case" of the Kennedy death "beyond the shadow of a doubt."

He says he knows the key individuals, the cities involved, and promises arrests. But when pressed to be more specific, he remains enigmatic, and poses a parable for the public:

"The key to the whole case is through the looking glass," he told reporters. "Black is white; white is black. I don't want to be cryptic, but that's the way it is."

Emerging from an attempt to unravel some of that riddle, and to place Garrison's investigation in perspective, is a tangled web of plot, counter-plot, and counter-counter plot; of rumors and wild talk; of some fact; some fiction, and, in the end, a tantalizing question mark.

The Thread Is Cuba

The thread that winds through the story involves one of the central problems of John F. Kennedy's two years, 10 months and two days in the White House—the problem of Cuba.

It is Garrison's obvious con-

clusion that Cubans were somehow involved in the President's death. From what can be learned at this time, his case appears to rest on one theory about the assassination:

That Oswald was working with an anti-Castro right-wing organization and actually intended to kill Fidel; that Oswald's publicly pro-Communist activities in New Orleans and his attempt to enter Mexico, and secure a Cuban visa were a ruse to enable him to carry out that Castro assassination objective; that when Oswald was denied entrance to Cuba, the plot shifted, and Kennedy, accused of letting down the anti-Castro Cubans at the Bay of Pigs, became the target. This theory has been examined at length in the past and has been discarded.

The New Factors

To these basic ingredients, Garrison seems to have added new factors. These are among them:

- The existence of a training camp for Cubans in St. Tammany Parish (County) across Lake Pontchartrain in the summer of 1963 where, supposedly, Oswald went for the purpose of participating in the plot to kill Castro.

- The later movement of an American, who reportedly organized that camp, from New Orleans to Houston.

- Two canceled checks drawn on the New Orleans Bank of Commerce in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, used to help pay the way back to Miami for two of the Cubans from that camp.

- The departure of other Cubans from New Orleans to Miami, and one to Dallas.

- Documents from an anti-Castro organization which operated briefly in New Orleans in 1962 and then was disbanded.

- A photograph of Oswald distributing pro-Castro litera-

ture on Canal Street here that shows a man supposedly later photographed behind a sign in Dealey Plaza in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

These are among the scraps that Garrison is known to be considering. On the surface, they seem to fall into much of the speculative character of the host of sensational books written about the assassination. Their value remains undetermined. Beyond this, everything is shrouded in conjecture.

A Link Is Needed

Out of all the smoke, one thing is certain: To prove any conspir-

acy Garrison must be able to link Oswald with others. That is where the relationship between Guy Banister's detective agency and the Cubans becomes crucial.

But more important, initially, is what the Warren Commission has determined about Oswald in New Orleans.

New Orleans first appears in the Oswald story on Sept. 20, 1959. On that date, nine days after his release from the Marine Corps, Oswald took a ship from New Orleans to LeHavre, France; as the first step of his journey to Russia.

Three years later, after his return to the U.S., Oswald came back to New Orleans in late April 1963, seeking a job. The next month, his wife and daughter joined him here.

From then until the third week in September, the Oswalds lived on Magazine Street in the city, but after his family went back to Texas, Oswald traveled to Mexico seeking a Cuban visa. On Oct. 4, he joined his family in Texas.

Oswald tried to organize a Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a pro-Castro group, in New Orleans. He passed out literature on the streets, and engaged in broadcast debates about Cuba. From these activities grew a number of conspiratorial theories about his supposed connection with Cuban groups, again both pro and anti-Castro.

The Warren Conclusion

The Warren Commission concluded that:

"Without exception, the rumors and allegations of a conspiratorial contact were shown to be without any factual basis, in some cases the product of mistaken investigation."

Nothing that Garrison has made public yet in any way alters those findings. His case, therefore, must dispute those conclusions by showing that Oswald had sinister relationships with others. There, the trail comes back to Banister's office.

What follows is an account of each of the principal links in

that part of the story, based on interviews and other sources.

GUY BANISTER — A former FBI agent and one-time New Orleans police official, militant anti-Communist, private detective, and once publisher of a weekly newspaper in this area, was found dead of a heart attack in his apartment here in June 1964.

He had a stormy and colorful career. Ten years before his death he had retired as the special FBI agent in charge of the Chicago FBI office. During his days with the bureau he had participated in some of the FBI's most celebrated cases—including Roger Touhy and John Dillinger.

Brief, Stormy Career

In 1955 Banister joined the New Orleans Police Department as chief investigator and supervisor of training, the third ranking member of the force. His career was relatively brief and stormy. He engaged in public quarrels with his superiors, and at one point charged they had conspired to "defeat justice" by stopping a police investigation.

In 1957, when he was the assistant police chief, he was suspended after he was accused of drawing a gun in a Bourbon Street bar. He was dismissed for what the police superintendent called "open defiance."

Banister drifted into investigative work. He bought a weekly newspaper, the West Bank Herald across the river here, where he employed, among others, Jack S. Martin. By 1960, he had formed his own detective agency and brought Martin along with him.

In those days, Banister continued to act with a flair. One prominent New Orleans citizen remembers Banister coming into a downtown hotel with a gun strapped to his leg. Drawing the pistol, he slammed it on the

table and said, "This is power."

Banister, without question, was actively involved in the anti-Castro cause before the Bay of Pigs. Whether in fact his office was the center of an arms cache, as is alleged here, is not known, but it is a fact that Cubans met there along with David Ferrie, a former pilot, and that they were observed by two of Banister's employes, Martin and David Lewis. These last two men seem to be principal original sources of information in Garrison's current investigation.

There is nothing substantive to indicate that Banister was personally involved in any supposed "plot."

JACK S. MARTIN — Martin, 52, is undoubtedly the most controversial figure of all those mentioned recently. He is supposed to have provided the initial leads for Garrison.

Martin's story has been told before and dismissed as unfactual by government investigators. It is authoritatively reported that Martin furnished information to Asst. D.A. Herman S. Kohlman here. Later, Martin is said to have disavowed his story entirely when questioned by the FBI during the Warren Commission investigation.

Martin Not Available

What Martin has said since, then, must come either from himself or from Garrison. Garrison is not saying; Martin is not here. He left town sometime at the end of last month and has not been heard from since.

His wife says that is not unusual. Jack, she says, takes off alone for several months every year.

Mrs. Martin talked at length to this reporter about her husband and the case. It was

the first time any newsman had been to see her, she said. She seemed to want to talk, and dwelt at length on the effect of the recent publicity on her and her 9-year-old son, Jack Jr.

"They have asked me if my husband is a nut, if he is a psychiatric case," she said. "They have asked me a number of uncomplimentary things. Now, my husband does drink but he drinks less than a lot of other people. I have tried to get him to join Alcoholics Anonymous, and some years ago I did get him to go into the New Orleans Charity Hospital for his drinking. That's before I stopped trying to change him."

"An Ordinary Man"

Then she said:

"Jack really isn't a man of mystery. He is a plain, ordinary, middle-aged man who comes home, puts on his slippers and holds his dog in his lap — a man who makes model planes for his son and a chapel (a religious chapel in the house) for his wife and hundreds of ecclesiastical heraldry for his friends."

To illustrate her point, she walked around the 150-year-old house and pointed to her husband's easels; to pictures of her husband with Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in Hollywood with a mayor of New Orleans; and to personally autographed "best wishes" photographs from, among others, Richard Nixon and Guy Banister.

At several points, she got up from her chair, and once, when the television showed Garrison making another statement, she said, "I'm so nervous and afraid of what they're going to say about Jack."

A Flying Tiger

Physically, Martin is small and thin, with a moustache. He was in the Flying Tigers before World War II. Since the war, according to his wife, he has been a reporter, a public relations man and a private investigator. "Whenever there's excitement or intrigue going on, there's Jack," she said once. "He's a natural for it."

Mrs. Martin said she had known Ferrie and a number of anti-Castro Cubans. She said she had never met Oswald, although she had heard the rumor that:

"Guy Banister's office was in this building, so were the Cubans and so, theoretically, was Lee Oswald's."

Calls Lewis Key

She believes that a key figure is David Lewis, who had worked with her husband and Banister and in recent years has been employed at the bus terminal here. "Lewis has an amazingly



—Associated Press

New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison (right) talks to newsmen about his investiga-

tion of what he calls the John F. Kennedy assassination "plot."

retentive memory," she said. "If anyone is of interest in this case it is David Lewis. He is sitting in probably the hottest seat in history."

DAVID LEWIS — Lewis, 26, a native of Houston, has publicly stated that he knows five persons involved in the assassination with Oswald. Lewis has appeared on television here, but has added nothing specific to that statement. After leaving Banister's employ, he got a job with the Trailways Bus Line terminal in the baggage department. He is married, and has four children.

DAVID WILLIAM FERRIE — Ferrie's name first figured in the assassination three days after Kennedy's death in Dallas. He was arrested that Nov. 25 in New Orleans and charged with being a fugitive from Texas. In view of what is happening now, the newspaper accounts of the arrest are instructive.

Ferrie, and two other young men, the papers here reported, were picked up "in connection with some leads of our own," District Attorney Garrison was quoted as saying, knocking down reports the FBI or Secret Service had asked for the arrests.

Ferrie and his friends were released in two days, and subsequent investigation by the FBI led the Warren Commission to dismiss him from serious consideration in the assassination. In fact, investigation proved, Ferrie was in New Orleans at the time of the assassination and no evidence was ever turned up to indicate that he knew Oswald or was in any way involved in the President's murder.

A Natural Candidate

Almost inevitably, though, Ferrie's personal character and background made him a natural candidate for a conspiratorial theory: He was a homosexual who had been fired from his job as an Eastern Airlines pilot after he was arrested in a "crime against nature" case; he was a militant anti-Castroite who actively participated in Bay of Pigs activity in New Orleans, and he was clearly an intelligent but disturbed person.

Mrs. Jack Martin, for instance, recalls what she says was Ferrie's "preoccupation with Socrates"—"his constant reaction to every problem was to walk up and down the room beating his forehead and saying 'Now what would Socrates have done?'" she recalls.

Ferrie had never tried to hide his activity on behalf of the

anti-Castro Cubans here, immediately after the Bay of Pigs invasion foundered in April 1961, he even made a speech about it before the Exchange Club of New Orleans.

His title was "The Recent Invasion of Cuba" and, that summer, after he was arrested in the morals case, a search of his apartment here turned up numerous maps of Cuba and seven or eight World War I rifles and a quantity of ammunition.

A 15-year old boy, who was involved in the morals case, said at the time that he had flown to Cuba with Ferrie on several occasions.

Physically Repelling

That was never substantiated. The official investigation held that he was not involved in the assassination.

Besides the facts surrounding his life, Ferrie himself was a singularly repelling figure physically. He was sickly, and his hair and his eyebrows had been burned off. Instead of buying an adequate wig, Ferrie affected a different, more striking device. He glued down his red toupee and false eyebrows with glueose cement.

He also was regarded as something of a quick-buck artist, anxious for money, but with little visible means of support.

After the latest flare of publicity in what is certainly going to be only still another in an endless rounds of rumors and sensations about the Kennedy death, Ferrie, unlike Martin, was quite willing to be interviewed, even though he was seriously ill.

On Monday of last week, he was interviewed by Theodore C. Link of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Garrison's investigation, he told Link, was "way off base."

About This Article

Haynes Johnson, who wrote this article, is a Pulitzer prize-winning special assignment reporter for The Star and author of the book "The Bay of Pigs," written with the assistance of the Cuban leaders of the 1961 invasion of Cuba.

The next evening, he spent four hours talking to George Lardner Jr., of the Washington Post, and denied ever knowing Oswald. Lardner probably was the last man to see him alive.

Dictates Own Epitaph

Ferrie had dictated his own epitaph in a note found in his apartment which read:

"To leave this life for me is a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable and on the other hand everything that is loathsome."

The coroner has ruled Ferrie died of natural causes. Garrison has called him one of history's most important suspects, without spelling out why. Even if this investigation is totally discredited, as many think it will be, Ferrie's death undoubtedly will add even more fuel to those already inflammatory rumors surrounding the Kennedy assassination.

THE CUBANS — Depending on whom you talk to, there are anywhere from a minimum of four to a maximum of 14 names being bandied about in New Orleans. They are, at this writing, still anonymous, but the names of several are already common knowledge.

This reporter has spoken with two of them here. The first, already mentioned in this story, spoke at great length in front of his wife in their living room.

Like Mrs. Martin, he seemed to want to pour out what he knew. He was especially incensed, he said, at reading that Garrison was saying it might be 30 years before arrests were made — a remark the D.A. later amended to weeks or months.

Speaks of Contacts

He spoke readily about his contacts with other Cubans, and with Ferrie and Banister. "Ferrie was active in the Cuban revolutionary front," he said. "I don't know when he got in, but he was active. He tried to help us raise money. We used to go to Guy Banister's office, and one of the reasons was because he was an anti-Communist. I don't know of any arms ever put in Guy Banister's office. There may have been before ... I don't know."

He added later, about Ferrie: "Ferrie could dream of things — he was a very bright intelligent person — and one time I remember he was going to try and get a small submarine and plan to get into Havana Bay and blow up one of those docks over there."

He also told of his meeting with Oswald and repeated in detail what he had reported to government investigators. It added nothing new to what has been written. As to the question of a Cuban training camp in St. Tammany Parish, he said he was aware of such a place, but had only vague knowledge of it. Specifically, he said, the camp

had broken up early in August because of endless bickering between Cubans there.

Calls Probe Crazy

Of Garrison's investigation, he said the district attorney, in his personal sessions with him, "changes quite a bit. One time he says Communists did it; another time, the refugees did it." He gave the names of people he knew involved in meetings at Banister's office, just as he has to Garrison, and includes the name of a young American who has left town.

At the end of a long conversation, which began in his house and included a tour of the places where the Cubans had met after the Bay of Pigs, he commented:

"I'll tell you about how this investigation is conducted. It's the craziest damn thing in the world."

That remains to be proved conclusively. The 6-foot-6-inch district attorney, with an undeniable flair about him, was correct when he referred to "through the looking glass." It is, after all, very much like Alice in Wonderland.